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TITLE: Sexual Networking and AIDS Education at the Workplace and the Community: The Case of oil locations in Nigeria

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ISSUE: Field-based Oil Workers are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS in the face of sexual network with commercial sex workers (CSW) and settlers at Oil Locations. This interaction requires an innovative, multi-pronged awareness and intervention program targeted at both groups and the community. This study was therefore designed to document the level of Sexual networking at Oil locations, determine factors that facilitate the above, its implications for the Oil and Gas industry in the era of HIV/AIDS, and modestly evaluate the effectiveness of the AIDS awareness program at the workplace.

SETTING: The fieldwork for this study, and the subsequent intervention program took place at the Oil locations in Nigeria which includes Tank farms, oilrigs, Flow stations/Badges, platforms, Bush bars and the surrounding host communities. The resident population on these settlements consists of Local and International (expatriate) personnel that are regular, contractor, or contract staffs, and local settlers. Access to the Oil locations and the surrounding settlements are mainly by sea or air.

PROJECT: Workers in the Oil and Gas Exploration and Production sector have a stable income, have poor access to health information and extremely mobile; spending long periods away from their usual partner and may therefore be exposed to high risk sexual behavior. A pre-program Key informant interviews, Questionnaire and Focus group discussion amongst Oil workers and CSW at Oil Locations revealed poor awareness, misconceptions and doubts about HIV/AIDS. There was a high level of sexual networking (focus and diffuse), multi-partnered sex with its attended multi-agents STDs. A well-articulated multi-pronged AIDS education program at the workplace and the surrounding community was initiated and directed at these subsets using basic facts about HIV/AIDS; blended with jokes, cartoons, poetry, drama, music, video shows and moonlight story telling. Comprehensive handouts on STDs/HIV/AIDS, safer sex practices were given and counseling sessions arranged.

RESULTS: This workplace-based AIDS prevention program became popular with workers. It became accepted by management and led to the establishment of a workplace policy on AIDS; an anti-AIDS Club. There was also a 40% reduction in case of STDs seen at the clinics; 65% increase in Phone-in and requests for counseling sessions by workers over a period of one year.

Condom demand and use have increased amongst the CSW and the surrounding community has started to respond to the challenges of HIV transmission.

LESSONS LEARNED: Field-based Oil Workers, like truck drivers, CSW, tourists, itinerant traders may need to be treated as a high-risk group both at the workplace and in the larger community. AIDS prevention programs at Oil Locations must also be targeted at the host communities in order to increase its success and achieve better company-host community relationships.

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